

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L DUBLIN 2342

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV PINT PFOR EI NI (UK)

SUBJ: GARRET FITZGERALD ON NORTHERN IRELAND

REF: (A) DUBLIN 2321 (B) BELFAST 414 (C) BELFAST 411

SUMMARY: IN A DETAILED DISCUSSION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER FITZGERALD ON NORTHERN IRELAND, I FOUND HIM SOMEWHAT PESSIMISTIC - ALTHOUGH THIS IS NOT UNTYPICAL OF HIS MOODS UPON RETURNING FROM THE NORTH. HE IS CONCERNED THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT IS "WAFFLING," AND HE IS ALSO FEELING DOWN ON HMG'S ACTION AND POLICY TOWARDS IRELAND FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS. ON THE AMERICAN CONNECTION HE URGES MORE EFFORTS ON GUN CONTROL. (OUR TALK TOOK PLACE BEFORE NEWS OF THE PHILADELPHIA INDICTMENTS REACHED DUBLIN). HE WORRIES ABOUT CONFIDENTIAL

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THE EXHAUSTION OF THE POLITICIANS IN NORTHERN IRELAND. I CONCLUDE

WITH THE FEELING THAT WE CAN DO MORE TO HELP THE SITUATION
WITHIN OUR GENERAL POLICY OF NON-INVOLVEMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. I DISCUSSED THE NORTHERN IRELAND SITUATION AT SOME LENGTH WITH FOREIGN MINISTER FITZGERALD DECEMBER 22. HE HAS JUST RETURNED FROM A TRIP TO BELFAST (BELFAST 411). HE EXPRESSED CONCERN AT THE TREND OF EVENTS, AND PARTICULARLY ABOUT THE "DRIFT" OF BRITISH POLICY, OR LACK OF POLICY. HE SAID THAT THE OPPOSITION HAS NOW FIRMED UP ITS POLICY VIS-A-VIS THE CONVENTION REPORT, I.E. THE REPORT IS UNACCEPTABLE AND ANY SOLUTION MUST INCLUDE POWER SHARING. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF, HE SAID, IS "WAFFLING" TOO MUCH BY EVEN AGREEING TO DISCUSS THE DETAILS OF THE REPORT WITH THE LOYALISTS, THUS CREATING THE ILLUSION IN THE LOYALISTS MINDS THAT REES AND WILSON ARE TOYING WITH THE IDEA OF MAJORITY RULE. WHEN THEIR ILLUSION IS EVENTUALLY SHATTERED, AS IT MUST BE, IT COULD BE "DRAMATIC" AND "DANGEROUS." FITZGERALD, HOWEVER, BELIEVES THERE IS LITTLE POSITIVE THE BRITISH CAN DO AT THE MOMENT. THEY MUST MANAGE TO HANDLE THINGS SO THE SITUATION DOES NOT GET WORSE. THEY MUST, HE ASSERTED WITH CONSIDERABLE EMPHASIS, GIVE A FIRM AND UNEQUIVOCAL ANSWER TO THE CONVENTION REPORT, BUT TRY TO AVOID BEING ABRASIVE AND PROVOCATIVE.

2. IN REGARD TO SECURITY, FITZGERALD SAID THAT, FROM ALL INDICATIONS, THE "PARAMILITARIES" INTEND TO KEEP AT THE PRESENT LEVEL OF VIOLENCE FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, BUT THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT IN TWO TO FOUR MONTHS THE LEVEL COULD ESCALATE TO A "DANGEROUS POINT." AGAIN, MUCH DEPENDS ON THE BRITISH HANDLING OF THE SITUATION. THE CALLING UP OF THE ULSTER DEFENSE REGIMENT (UDR) IN ARMAGH YESTERDAY, FOR INSTANCE, COULD BE A "GHASTLY MISTAKE," ALTHOUGH FITZGERALD SAID HE HAD NOT REALLY WEIGHED UP THE PROS AND CONS AS YET. HE SAID THAT (UNAMED) BRITISH SECURITY CHIEFS HAD TOLD HIM IN BELFAST THAT IT WAS EASIER TO CONTROL THE UDR WHEN THEY WERE MOBILIZED THAN OTHERWISE. BUT THE UDR ARE A BAD LOT, HE SAID, AND THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE, BULLETS AND SUCH, WHICH INDICATE THAT PERSONNEL OF THE UDR ARE DEEPLY INVOLVED IN SOME OF THE LATEST TERRORIST ATTACKS.

3. FITZGERALD CAREFULLY REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES HIS "LACK OF CONFIDENCE" IN THE BRITISH. PAUL KEATING, MFA SECRETARY AND 2ND MAN IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, WHO WAS ALSO PRESENT IN THE CONVERSATION, CONFIDENTIAL

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BROUGHT UP THE "BRITISH ANTI-IRISH PRESS CAMPAIGN." (SEE DUBLIN 2321). KEATING SAID THIS MIGHT BE SEEN AS "PROVOCATIONS." FITZGERALD THEN DIPLOMATICALLY SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH IT WAS APPARENT THE CAMPAIGN WAS "DIRECTED," HE DID NOT WANT TO IMPUTE ANY OTHER MOTIVES THAN AN ATTEMPT TO "PASS THE BUCK" AT A PARTICULARLY BAD TIME FOR HMG WHEN TERRORISTS WERE SURGING IN LONDON. KEATING ALSO MENTIONED THE STRASBOURG TRIBUNAL REPORT WHICH HE SAID WOULD BE PUBLISHED IN JANUARY AND WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY CONDEMN THE

BRITISH. FITZGERALD CITED THIS AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF "INSENSITIVITY." "AT ANY TIME," HE SAID, "THE BRITISH COULD HAVE APPROACHED US AND WE COULD HAVE WORKED OUT THE STRASBOURG BUSINESS. BUT INSTEAD THEY EXPECTED US TO APPROACH THEM. I CANNOT FATHOM THEIR REASONING. AND SO WE HAVE THIS UNNECESSARY IRRITANT IN OUR RELATIONS."

4. TURNING TO THE AMERICAN CONNECTION, I REITERATED THE NON-ININVOLVEMENT POLICY BUT ASKED HIM WHAT WE COULD DO TO DEFLECT SOME OF THE MISUNDERSTANDING IN THE U.S. FITZGERALD CHUCKLED AND SAID: "CALL HAROLD WILSON OFF* HE HAS SET BACK OUR EFFORTS FOR SOME PERIOD. I TRIED TO TELL HIM HE WAS NOT THE RIGHT PERSON."

NOTE: THIS REFERS TO WILSON'S DEC. 17 BBC INTERVIEW WHEN HE ANGRILY DENOUNCED THE AMERICANS SUPPORTING THE TERRORISTS - SEE LONDON 19439). THEN FITZGERALD SAID THAT, SINCE I ASKED, HE DID BELIEVE THE USG COULD DO MORE IN CONTROLLING THE ARMS SMUGGLING, THOUGH HE WAS APPRECIATIVE OF OUR EFFORTS AND SUCCESSES SO FAR IN THIS AREA. HE THEN SUGGESTED SPECIFICALLY THAT THE PROSECUTORS IN FUTURE CASES MAKE MORE OF A POINT OF THE "NORAID" CONNECTIONS.

5. I ASKED ABOUT THE EC AND ITS POSSIBLE INVOLVEMENT IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND SITUATION. FITZGERALD REPLIED THAT AT THE PRESENT MOMENT THE OTHER EC GOVERNMENTS CAN HAVE, AND SHOULD HAVE, NO POSITIVE ROLE BECAUSE NEITHER THE GOI NOR HMG HAVE ASKED THEM. HOWEVER, HE SAID, "IF THE BRITISH SHOULD LURCH INTO A DIRECTION WHICH WE CANNOT ACCEPT, AND THAT IS POSSIBLE, WE WILL NOT ONLY BE ASKING THE EC COUNTRIES BUT THE USG FOR ASSISTANCE." HE REFINED THIS BY SAYING HMG IS STILL "FORMALLY" IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, ALTHOUGH THEIR PERFORMANCE IN THE LAST YEAR HAS BEEN POOR; FOR EXAMPLE, THE TALKS WITH SINK FEIN WHICH WERE "BOTH WRONG AND STUPID."

6. BOTH FITZGERALD AND KEATING, TOWARD THE END OF THE CONVERSATION, CONFIDENTIAL

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TION, FINALLY REVEALED, I BELIEVE, THEIR CHIEF WORRY WHEN THEY TALKED OF THE "ALMOST COMPLETE EXHAUSTION" OF THE POLITICIANS, ON BOTH SIDES, IN NORTHERN IRELAND, AND I GATHERED THAT THIS WAS THE MAIN IMPRESSION OF FITZGERALD'S NORTHERN TRIP. HE SAID THAT OVER THE YEARS HE HAS DETECTED A "SUICIDAL TENDENCY" IN POLITICAL LEADERS OF BOTH SIDES, AND IT IS DANGEROUSLY NEAR THE SURFACE NOW. ALREADY SOME OF THE BEST POLITICIANS, LIKE CURRIE, ARE HAVING TO SEEK JOBS - "THE WISDOM OF WESTMINSTER" HAVING DECREED THAT THEIR SALARIES AS CONVENTION MEMBERS ARE BARELY AT THE SUBSISTENCE LEVEL. THERE IS A PARTICULAR DEARTH OF "POLITICAL AMBITION," PAISLEY AND CRAIG BEING CONSPICUOUS EXCEPTIONS, AND SUCH A DEARTH IS DANGEROUS FOR ANY SOCIETY. THE SDLP, HE SAID, IS UNDER TREMENDOUS PRESSURE TO ABANDON ITS MODERATE STANCE. THERE SEEMS TO BE NOTHING COMING FROM THE OTHER SIDE AT ALL. "WHY CAN'T THEY ACCEPT 70 PERCENT OF POWER, WHICH IS, AFTER ALL,

A GREAT DEAL OF POWER?"

7. COMMENT: THE TALK HAD ITS CURIOUS ASPECTS, AS I FOUND FITZ-GERALD MUCH MORE DOWN ON THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT THAN I HAVE DETECTED BEFORE AND MORE THAN THE SITUATION SEEMS TO WARRANT. HIS LEIDEN SPEECH (BELFAST 411) SEEMS TO HAVE SPARKED MORE OF A POSITIVE REACTION, BOTH IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND IN THE UK, THAN HE POSSIBLY EXPECTED. IT WAS NOT HEAVILY REPORTED HERE IN THE REPUBLIC. THE SPEECH ITSELF WAS A SUMMING UP OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S POLICY ON NORTHERN IRELAND. THERE WAS A NEW NOTE IN HIS FIRST STATEMENT THAT DEVOLUTION IS NECESSARY, I.E. IF ALL THE INTRACTABLE CIRCLES ARE SQUARED. BUT THIS POSITIVE REACTION HAS PERHAPS MADE FITZGERALD WONDER IF HE HAS NOT GONE TOO FAR IN ACCOMMODATION, POLITICS HERE ARE AT LEAST AS DELICATE AS ELSEWHERE. ALSO, I SUSPECT THAT FITZGERALD MAY HAVE HAD HIS SENSIBILITIES BRUISED LATELY BY THE BRITISH DIPLOMATS. I FEEL THAT THE BRITISH COULD DO MORE IN COMMUNICATION WITH THIS GOVERNMENT WHICH I BELIEVE IS WORKING HARD TO COOPERATE IN HELPING ALLEVIATE THE NORTHERN IRELAND TROUBLES.

8. IN OUR ANNUAL POLICY STATEMENT I WILL HAVE SOME SUGGESTIONS TO MAKE IN REGARD TO THE AMERICAN CONNECTION AND ITS SUPPORT OF THE PROVISIONAL IRA. IN THEIR SIXTH YEAR OF THE CURRENT NORTHERN IRELAND CRISIS THE OUTLOOK IS PESSIMISTIC - AS FITZGERALD SAID, THE BEST ONE CAN HOPE FOR NOW IS NOT TO MAKE THINGS WORSE.

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ON CONCERNING FITZGERALD'S POINT ABOUT THE "EXHAUSTION" OF THE POLITICIANS, A RELIABLE SOURCE TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT THE SDLP'S PADDY DEVLIN IS SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING "OPTING OUT" AND ACCEPTING A POSITION IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC. THIS IS BEING VERY CLOSELY HELD; THE FEELING IS THAT THE PARTY COULD SURVIVE THE LOSS OF ONE OR TWO OF ITS MODERATE LEADERS BUT IF MORE DEPARTED IT WOULD CREATE A THREAT TO THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE PARTY. END COMMENT. CURLEY

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